

Town of Lincoln

Budget Board Meeting

February 15, 2006

Members Present:

Jack Newman Ken Booth Carl Brunetti Cheryl Ethier

Bob Ericson Claudette Lussier Greg Leonard Mary Varr

Linda Noble Joe Dziobek Roberta Gosselin

No members were absent.

The meeting began with the Pledge of Allegiance at 7:05.

Town Administrator Sue Sheppard was in attendance to present her recommended 2006-2007 budget.

The Town Administrator noted that there were great cooperative efforts between the Town Administration and the School Department.

Last year the town raised \$42,923,000 in property tax revenues, and a 2% growth rate would mean an increase of \$858,000.

The maximum amount of property tax revenues that the town can lawfully receive is \$46,142,000 according to the Town Administrator's calculations unless there are significant increases in revenues or decreases in expenses.

The town is due to bond \$3 million in the coming year.

The Town Administrator noted that Lincoln Park revenues must be used to reduce the tax burden to residents, and not as a reason to increase the budget.

Currently, there has been about \$2.1 million in Lincoln Park revenue at the 6-month mark, which is right on target with the revenues projected by the Budget Board.

Lincoln Park revenues will increase next year due to a new addition that they are currently building.

In health care, all municipal unions have been asked to look at a change in plans and benefits. The Town Administrator felt that the unions needed to move to a self-insured program.

The Fire Medics have settled their contract and have agreed upon a 3.5% salary increase.

The Town Hall Employees contracts have not been resolved. The salary issues are settled, but there is still health care and pension discussion going on.

The Police contracts are going to go to arbitration.

In Capital, the Town Administrator noted the following:

The 3rd payment on a rescue vehicle is due this year.

The Sidewalk 50% repair program is popular and needs to be funded.

A new recycling truck is needed because one breaks down often which increases tipping fees because other trucks go over their usual

loads.

The landfill at Almond Field has closed.

Barney Pond and Manton dams need to be fixed, and the town will be applying for grants.

Some future needs that are not in the recommended 2006-2007 budget:

Basketball court repaving at Fairlawn and Saylesville

Playground equipment at Albion Park.

A trash collection truck at \$150,000 (the youngest one is a 1994 model)

A new sander for \$140,000 which proves to be a great time saver.

Tennis court refurbishing for \$150,000

The dams may cost up to \$2 million and will be done in 4 phases.

One new rescue vehicle every 3 years.

A truck washing facility which is a new DEM mandate.

The Town Administrator recommended the following for the Schools Budget:

\$44,780,148 total, a 10.5% increase

\$1,279,623 is for the new middle school, 3.2% of the increase.

\$2,967,489 is for the increased operating budget, 7.3% of the increase

\$83,000 is for capital, which is only what is needed for the middle school.

\$3,628,692 is the total increase in schools, which is 8.8%

The total municipal budget is \$15,267,317, an increase of \$805,493 or 5.5%

There will be a resolution of \$30,000 for a fire and rescue service study because the last study was 15 years ago and there have been significant changes in the system since then.

There is \$31,000 in the Town Clerk lines for elections

There is \$135,000 in Tax Assessor for statistical updates following the revaluation.

There is one new police officer in the recommended budget, not related to the new middle school, however there are no grants available to fund the new officer.

Engineering will need toner and copy paper for their new copier

Code Enforcement needs money for demolitions and property clean up

The Parks and Recreation Dept. need money for a new special education program for the new middle school.

Storm damage to trees has caused an increased expense.

The sewer department has a new employee and need to add three more pump stations and to maintain aging pump stations

Half of the cost of the library security system is funded in the buildings in the municipal budget, the other half is in the library budget.

The new heating system has saved \$20,000 in electric bills this year.

The town hall employees will be working 35 hours once the contract is settled, as opposed to the 32.5 that they now work.

The health care increase will be 5%, and the workers compensation rate will be 23%

The town is currently negotiating light duty tasks to help workers ease back into work after injuries, etc.

The public works crew is an older work force, and there are increasing rubbish demands, so the town is looking into privatization.

The recommended Total Combined budget was \$66,885,519, a 9.5% total increase.

Roberta Gosselin noted that there is a bond for \$5 million in capital and that there really should be a capital plan for the money.

The Town Administrator felt that the \$30,000 for fire and rescue studies should be in the resolution because she felt that the taxpayers should be able to vote on it.

Roberta Gosselin noted that the town can get an emergency waiver to exceed the cap or they can get permission to take the increases in debt service out of the calculations.

It was noted that the town should look into getting a grant writer as a consultant to increase the number of grants it receives.

The meeting was turned over to School Superintendent John Tindall-Gibson to present his recommended 2006-2007 school budget.

Staff reductions will include a custodian at the high school, a 1st grade teacher from Northern Elementary, and an Administrator at Northern Elementary.

There will be no increase in transportation because when the new middle school is operated, they will add a tier of busing to use the transportation currently in operation.

The recommended budget was \$46,669,544, a 12.7% increase

The \$1200 rebate for lighting improvements would use 35% less electricity using the current fixtures.

The school anticipates the following grants:

\$100,000 for Physics First

\$16,440 for Electronic Portfolios

\$500 for the student-run bookstore

\$500 for the CVS Health Fair

\$1,000 from Wal-Mart

2 Legislative grants, \$1,000 each

The Superintendent noted that it was a thin budget that he recommended and there was not extra money padding accounts.

He also noted that they do plan to seek an emergency waiver.

Claudette Lussier noted that even though there seems to be a spirit of cooperation between the schools and the town, there is still a discrepancy between the school's recommended budget and the Town Administrator's recommended budget for the schools.

Jeff Weiss noted that what the school presented is what the schools need to offer the current services it provides and it is essential.

Joe Dziobek asked if the Town Administrator is in favor of the schools asking for an emergency waiver. Sue Sheppard stated that she is in favor of them requesting a waiver.

Ken Booth asked the Town Administrator what the proposed tax rate based on the recommended budget would be. Sue Sheppard replied that it would be a \$1.05 - \$1.25 increase. If the town receives an emergency waiver, it may be as high as \$1.85.

Georgia Fortunato stated that the goal is to have programs in place to bring some special education students back into the district, and while this will save money in the long run, there

will be costs for consultants to work with the kids once they are back in our district.

Carl Brunetti if the recommended budgets were obtained by beginning at a zero base or by working off of the previous year's budget.

Sue Sheppard and Jeff Weiss replied that they base it on the previous year.

Roberta Gosselin asked how much of the \$35 million bond would be for the new middle school.

\$26 million would be for the construction of the school.

\$4.5 million would be for renovations to existing structures.

The Administrator at Northern Elementary was cut because there were 3 administrators but with the 6th graders leaving and a reduction in 1st graders, they did not need 3. There will be one administrator for the elementary, and one for the early learning center.

Even with the loss of a 1st grade teacher, there will be 15 students in a class.

Cheryl Ethier asked if the schools had a back up plan in case they did not receive the emergency waiver. They do not yet.

Jack Newman stated that he was disappointed that the town and schools did not begin their budget process with a zero base rather than previous budget.

There are no estimates yet as to how much will be saved with the energy efficiency plan.

The schools have not projected the Medicaid revenue but did note that it may go down when some special education students come back into district.

The Budget Board welcomed public comment and questions.

Benny Sisto noted that the town should have a 5-10 year plan, not just for capital but in all aspects of the budget.

Benny did note that not only are there increases in salaries to consider, but the population is growing as well.

John Tindall-Gibson agreed that having a plan to forecast and project the budget would be better.

Benny Sisto noted that if the Auditor General does not allow the emergency waiver, the town could take a look at selling off some properties.

The Budget Board took a break and then rejoined to complete their

scheduled meeting.

The minutes of February 9th were distributed for review.

Jack Newman made a motion to accept, seconded by Cheryl Ethier.

Bob Ericson changed the wording on Page 4 to read: Bob Ericson noted the high cost of running the current middle/high school at 70 % capacity.

The minutes were approved by unanimous vote.

Joe Dziobek noted that the proposed Special Financial Town Meeting will now be scheduled for March 28th.

In correspondence, a letter was received from Lonsdale Elementary regarding library staffing.

Ken Booth noted that Lincoln Park revenues were actually adjusted up by the Budget Board from the Town Administrators projection last year, and growth was increased to .5% up from 0 and it ended up being 1.5%

The Budget Board discussed the idea of an emergency waiver request.

Linda Noble suggested finding out when other towns found out whether their waivers were granted to get an idea of when Lincoln would find out if it was approved.

Linda Noble also noted that the tour of the new middle school given with its Principal was very good.

Ken Booth noted that the proposed Special Financial Town Meeting was only about 40 days before the Financial Town Meeting and wondered if the Budget Board should take a position on it, particularly the issue of special interest groups.

The Budget Board discussed the homestead exemption and the possible implications if it was adjusted for mixed use parcels.

The Budget Board welcomed public comment and questions.

Benny Sisto noted that the 7% increase projected was spread over many items, not just one and wondered how that would qualify for an emergency waiver.

He noted that the bond did not include operating costs of the new middle school.

The next Budget Board Meeting will be on February 22nd at 7:30.

Jack Newman made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Greg Leonard.

The meeting adjourned at 9:40.